



Brrrrr!

If your vehicle breaks down in the cold, don't lose your cool.

by Dawn Jourdan

Few things are inevitable, but Kansans can count on this: Just as Kansas summers are hot, the winters will be cold. Transit vehicles are sensitive to extreme weather conditions—and so are their passengers. For this reason, drivers must prepare to deal with weather-related problems, such as a vehicle breakdown when the temperature has dropped below freezing.

Most breakdowns can be prevented if the vehicle is properly inspected and maintained on a daily basis. However, some problems elude even the most diligent drivers. Your must have a plan of action to enable you to “keep their cool” when it is cold outside.

Your primary concern should be the safety the passengers. Therefore, the first step in dealing with a vehicular malfunction is removing the vehicle from the flow of traffic. Slowly pull over onto the shoulder of the road or other location out of the way of traffic. Put the vehicle in “park,” apply the emergency brake and turn on the hazard lights. Then radio your agency’s dispatcher to report the problem. Depending on the malfunction, you may wish to ask for assistance immediately or wait until the problem has been

thoroughly assessed.

If you choose to assess the problem before seeking assistance from the dispatcher, a number of important steps must be taken before you leave the vehicle. First, tell the passengers why you have pulled over and the steps you are taking to address the problem. Tell passengers to remain inside the vehicle and in their seats, for the time being. Next, check to make sure that each passenger is wearing a coat, hat and gloves. The vehicle should be equipped with additional hats and gloves and enough warm blankets to have enough for each passenger.

You should also be able to instruct passengers on a few simple exercises that they may do while seated to keep themselves warm. Hand clapping and foot stomping are the easiest and most effective ways to help keep warm.

Once the passengers have been adequately advised about the situation and their warmth is assured, you should let the passengers know that you will be momentarily exiting the vehicle so that the problem may be assessed. Be aware of traffic and weather conditions when exiting the vehicle. The door of the vehicle should be closed immediately to protect passengers from the cold.

The vehicle assessment must be conducted as quickly as possible.

Don’t attempt to fix any malfunction that would take more than a few minutes. A few minutes out in the elements can be detrimental to your health.

Unless a quick fix is possible, your next step should be to get help. Most transit vehicles are equipped with a radio or cell phone. Once contacted, the dispatcher can send help immediately. If these fail to function, you may be tempted to seek help on foot. However, leaving the vehicle and its passengers unattended is not recommended for safety reasons. The best option is to flag down a passerby willing to telephone the dispatcher or the police.

Upon summoning assistance, return to the vehicle and check on the passengers. Begin by telling passengers the steps that have been taken to secure assistance. Then assess the comfort of your passengers by asking them how they feel. Often older passengers, passengers with disabilities or those taking medications will not be as aware of the cold. This does not mean that they are not at risk. Rather, some passengers are slow in realizing that they are being affected by the change in temperature.

The effects and quick onslaught of hypothermia on stationary passengers should not be underestimated. Join the passengers in foot-stomping

and hand-clapping exercises. Passengers that are unable to perform such movements should be carefully monitored for signs of cold such as shivering or numbness. Cover them with extra blankets to ensure their health and safety.

While this plan of action is highly detailed, the steps contained in it will happen quickly in the case of a breakdown. All drivers in your agency should be instructed on these or similar procedures and have the opportunity to practice them so that they are well equipped to deal with winter breakdowns if, and when, they occur.

Sources:

www.commuter-register.org;
www.theautochannel.com;
Nevada Milepost, Winter 1995;
Kansas LTAP Winter Fact Sheet,
Fall 1999. ▲

Winter Emergency Kit

The Scotti School of Defensive Driving, Medford, Mass., encourages drivers to carry the following:

- * windshield scraper
- * booster cables
- * small snow shovel
- * boots and heavy socks
- * sand or cat litter (for traction)
- * wire-drying spray for moisture problems under the hood
- * a blanket for yourself (as well as those for passengers)
- * snow brush
- * de-icing spray
- * tire chains

Also helpful are: flashlights, rope, a first aid kit, extra fuses, a fire extinguisher, flares or reflective emergency triangles, a pocket knife, extra chains and a CB radio or cellular phone. Waterproof winter clothing, high-calorie food and a jug of water can come in handy, too.

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CDL Legislation, continued from page 1

passed by the House of Representatives in October, 1999 as one strategy to improve motor carrier safety. A similar bill entitled the "Motor Carrier Safety Improvement Act of 1999" is pending before the Senate.

Program Changes Proposed

New Motor Carrier Safety

Administration. A purpose of this proposed legislation is to improve the Commercial Drivers License (CDL) Program, as presently set forth in 49 U.S.C. 31311(a). If adopted, the bill would establish a separate Motor Carrier Safety Administration within the Department of Transportation. According to an August 5, 1999 press release sent out by the office of Senator John McCain (R-AZ), this new agency would be charged with carrying out the Federal motor carrier

safety enforcement and regulatory responsibilities currently held by the FHWA. The agency would be headed by an administrator, appointed by the President and approved by the Senate.

CDLs Needed to Drive Smaller

Vehicles. The legislation, if passed, also would change certain elements of the current CDL Program. One key change for Kansas transit providers is a proposed requirement that drivers of commercial vehicles capable of holding eight or more passengers obtain a commercial driver's license. The current law applies to drivers of vehicles designed to transport 16 or more passengers. The potential implications of this legislation is that agencies may have difficulty finding drivers with

CDLs, agencies may bear the cost of re-licensing in order to attract or retain drivers, and agencies will have additional costs of testing for drug and alcohol now required of CDL-licensed drivers of larger vehicles.

This bill is currently being examined by the Senate Surface Transportation Subcommittee and has not been slated for hearing. Its status may be monitored by contacting Senator McCain's office by telephone at (202) 224-2235. The text of the bill is accessible on the Web at: <http://thomas.loc.gov>

Sources: www.fhwa.dot.gov/contactus/press/1999/101499.htm; "Commercial Driver License in Kansas," *RTAP Fact Sheet*, April 1990; and *Kansas Trans Reporter*, May 1990. ▲